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STRICTURES

ON A

PAMPHLET,

by Edward Coote

ENTITLED

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST AN

UNION

BETWEEN

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND,

CONSIDERED.

John Hume Esq. of Dublin

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OBSERVATIONS

ON A

PAMPHLET, &c.

A PUBLICATION having lately appeared, under the title of "Arguments for and against a Union between Great Britain and Ireland considered," which the public mind was, by a previous report, prepared to receive, as the production of a gentleman of high official situation in this country, not only sanctioned but authorised by the government, as containing a statement of the specific terms upon which a Union was intended to be proposed, I was led by a full conviction of the importance of the subject, and an anxious solicitude for the dearest interests of this country, which it involves, to give it an attentive, and I hope impartial, perusal:

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but what was my surprise, to find that so far from stating any specific plan of a Union, it disavows any such intention, and proposes only a consideration of the general arguments upon the subject, having for its object to prove that the question deserves a temperate discussion ;—a fact no man will deny.

Equally unskilled in the intrigues of the statesman, the subtilties of the lawyer, and the speculations of the merchant, I offer to my countrymen the reflections of a plain and humble mind, with the sole view of preventing them from being pre-occupied by the sophistry of the pamphlet I allude to, and of inducing them to form and declare their opinions upon the subject of it, in that decided and energetic manner which the importance of it demands.

I am convinced that many abler pens will be employed in the discussion of this subject ; but if the following sheets shall awaken a single Irishman to a sense of the mischiefs with which his country is threatened, I shall consider this, my first intrusion upon the public, as pardonable.

Though the pamphlet professes to be a dispassionate enquiry into the merits of the arguments on *both* sides, yet that the author is the advocate of the British government in favour of a Union, is too obvious to be mistaken : I shall however suppose
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that it really is what it professes to be, and shall endeavour to shew the fallacy of the arguments on which it relies.

The arguments adduced in support of a Union, by the author of the pamphlet, may be classed under two heads :—

First—Those deduced from the evils under which this country at present labours.

Secondly—Those arising from the benefits likely to result to it from a Union with Great Britain.

With respect to the first: The ills which have already fallen upon, and which still impend over, this ill-fated land, the civil and religious discontents, the jealousies and disturbances, the conspiracies, the insurrections, and the rebellions which (to use the words of the pamphlet) have disgraced us, are imputable, not (as the author of the pamphlet asserts) to our defects in civilization and policy, but to the mal-administration of the government; and I hold it unfair in the author of the pamphlet, to resort to them as an argument, until he has first traced them to their source, and proved them to originate from the relative situation of the two countries—and not from the intrigues of the British cabinet, which have been calculated to foment those discontents, to excite those jealousies, to connive at those insurrections, and finally, to amnestify those

those rebellions, for the purpose of promoting their favourite, and now avowed, object. But—I will endeavour to follow the author of the pamphlet through his arguments.

The Sabines (says the author) no longer able to maintain themselves against the power of Rome, relinquished their independence and by their Union laid the foundation of Roman greatness *.

It is evident, that no analogy can exist between the relative situation of the Romans and Sabines, and that of Great Britain and Ireland; the former were governed by distinct and dissimilar governments, and at war with each other; the latter are on terms of amity, and their executive government is the same. If he considers this as a conquered nation, unable to maintain itself against the power of Great Britain, and would wish to unite them, in order to lay the foundation of British greatness, (which is perhaps nearer the truth than he would choose to acknowledge) he is then driven to the necessity of abandoning the flattering theory of a Union, upon fair and equitable terms.

The arguments drawn from the Heptarchy, are totally inapplicable to Ireland. Let us consider those drawn from Scotland.

It will, I believe, be admitted, that with respect to agriculture, arts, manufactures, and commerce, this kingdom is in a much more forward and flourishing state at this day than Scotland, notwithstanding all the advantages she is supposed to have derived from the Union, which has now existed near a century. Can then any argument drawn from the state of Scotland at the time of the Union, be applicable to this country at present? Beside, Ireland now enjoys the full benefit of the laws and constitution of Great Britain, from which Scotland was excluded before the Union.

But there are two circumstances, which the author of the pamphlet, notwithstanding his affectation of candour, has thought it prudent to pass over in silence; and which, in my mind, completely overturns all analogy between Scotland and Ireland.

First—That the hand of nature has fixed the sea as a boundary between Great Britain and this country, as if to mark the propriety of their being independent of each other.

Secondly—That one of the chief arguments in favour of the Union between England and Scotland, namely, that it would prevent the possibility of the two kingdoms being governed by different monarchs, (and which must have been the case, had the issue of James the Second failed before the Union)

on,) cannot apply to Ireland—the crown of which is inseparably united to that of Great Britain.

Another argument in favour of the policy of a Union between Great Britain and Ireland, is drawn from the example of France; an example loudly and incessantly reprobated by every member of the British government, and reserved for the author of the pamphlet to cite as an object of imitation!

In enumerating the disadvantages attendant upon the existence of separate legislatures, in two independent kingdoms, under the same sovereign, the author of the pamphlet makes use of the following words *.

“ The sovereign must reside in one of the king-
 “ doms: there would of course be the metropolis
 “ of the empire; there would be the real seat of the
 “ government; thence would flow all the counsels;
 “ and thither would resort those who wished for
 “ favour and emolument. The kingdom where
 “ the monarch did not reside, not having the ori-
 “ gination of all counsels and measures, and having
 “ much of its rents carried away by absentees,
 “ would be in a perpetual state of jealousy and dis-
 “ content, and being separate in all respects but in
 “ the individual person of the monarch, would be
 “ a prey to foreign faction; and an empire thus

* Page 10.

“ composed

“ composed could never be in a state of full security, for there never could be a certainty that all parts of it would pursue the same system.”

I am still to learn, which of the mischiefs stated in the foregoing paragraph, as arising from the present constitution of this country, would be removed, or even mitigated, by a Union. Would the metropolis of the empire, or the real seat of the government, be fixed in Ireland? Would the councils of the empire originate there? Would Dublin be resorted to by the candidates for courtly favour or emolument? Would jealousy and discontent be removed by a reduction of the absentee list? Would the intrigues of foreign faction be discouraged and defeated, by the superior vigilance and promptitude of a legislature, resident in, and occupied by the concerns of another kingdom? or in fine—would such a certainty of an identity of interest be extended to the whole empire, as would give complete and permanent security?

Having taken a view of the disadvantages stated by the pamphlet, to attend the present constitution of this country, let us now consider the advantages which it supposes likely to result from the adoption of a Union, upon fair and equitable principles.

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* “The monarch would remain in England as
 “at present: the absentee proprietors of land
 “*might* encrease.”

That they *must* do so, no man will be hardy enough to deny: but indeed the author's candour is equally conspicuous in this admission, as in his statement that near *one* million of the rents of the kingdom are annually exported to the absentees, when it is notorious that they amount to considerably above *two* millions.

“London, *as at present*, would be the general resort for business, for advancement, for pleasure.”

Here again the author's candour is conspicuous: Can it be doubted that London must be *much more* resorted to than at present?

“But the British cabinet would receive a mixture
 “of Irishmen, and the councils of the British parliament would be much influenced by the weight
 “and ability of the Irish members.”

The British cabinet has already, at different periods received a mixture of Irishmen, nor have Irish members of weight and ability been wanting in the British Parliament; and can it be conceived that what the efforts of those men, aided by a free and independent (and therefore a bold and spirited) legislature in this country, were unable to attain,

can be accomplished by a handful of pensioned mercenaries, who having already bartered their own honour, and the rights of the people they misrepresent, will conclude the infamous traffic by selling even their political reversion.

“ All our party contests would be transferred to Great Britain; British faction would cease to operate here; there would be no jealousy of British influence on the cabinet or parliament.”

This, if true, serves only to remind us of Harlequin, who proposed curing the tooth-ach by cutting off the patient's head.

“ There would be no clashing of distinct interests, NO FEAR OF IRELAND BECOMING TOO POWERFUL TO GOVERN.”

I am inclined to think that the author of the pamphlet, (notwithstanding that portion of political sagacity which he is allowed to possess) has here inadvertently discovered the true and governing principle by which Great Britain is determined to promote an Union. But I would ask him, what he means by “ no fear of Ireland becoming too powerful to govern?”—Does he mean that Great Britain would then have such an entire ascendancy in the councils and legislature of the nation, and that Ireland would be so degraded and sunk in political consequence, that she would

not dare to resist any measure which Great Britain might choose to adopt, and must tamely submit not only to be governed by her, but to be governed in any manner, however ignominious, that she might dictate?—

“ France could no longer speculate on the nature of our distinct government and parliament, and hope to separate the kingdom in fact from Great Britain, as it is already separated in theory.”

If a parliament, consisting of three hundred members, resident in and deriving their support from this kingdom, could not, by their influence and exertions, counteract the effect of French speculations, can it be supposed that the shadow of a parliament, resident in another country, and looking to that country alone for honour and emolument, could accomplish it? Beside it is notorious, that the first effects of those speculations were visible on the estates of absentee proprietors, and of course their influence might be expected to keep pace with the increase of absentees.

“ The cultivation, the improvement of Ireland, like that of Scotland, would be peculiarly attended to, as the increase of our wealth, consequence, ability, and power, must tend to increase

“ create the security of the empire, not to endanger it.”

The comparative deficiency of Scotland in arts, commerce, and manufactures, forbid all jealousy of her as a rival, and therefore was her improvement peculiarly attended to; but as so long since as the reign of King William, England not only regarded this country with a jealous eye, but actually forced her to relinquish her then staple manufacture, giving her in return that, which the persevering industry of her people has since brought to perfection; so we may fairly conclude, that every measure tending to encourage the manufactures, or promote the trade of the country, would be considered as clashing with the interest of Great Britain, to whom (to use the author's own words) “ * a preference will be always given.”

From the foregoing view it is evident, that the proposed measure of an Union would neither, on the one hand remedy the disadvantages stated by the pamphlet to attend the present constitution of this country; nor, on the other, produce the advantages which the pamphlet has supposed to arise from it.

The author of the pamphlet says, in page 12, that “ the interests of England *must* ever preponderate,

“ derate, a *preference* will be *always* given to her.”
 I own I am at a loss to conceive how that position is reconcileable with his assertion in page 39, that “ an Union will place the Irish merchant upon “ an equality with the British, and he will be *cert-*
tain to enjoy *for ever* the same privileges, pro-
 “ tections, regulations, bounties, &c.”—If the former of these positions be true, an Union upon fair and equitable terms is not attainable; if the latter, it presupposes either that all rivalry between the two kingdoms in trade and manufactures must cease, which can only be produced by the entire extinction of them in this country, or that the British parliament, with an unexampled liberality, would prefer the interest of this country to that of Great Britain.

The author of the pamphlet asserts * that “ so
 “ long as the Irish Parliament shall remain free
 “ and independent, it must be subject to the ca-
 “ bals of British party,” that is, in other words, that so long as an Irish parliament, consisting of three hundred members, shall continue to sit in this kingdom, for the purpose of legislating for this kingdom, so long the British minister may find it impossible utterly to extinguish all public spirit; a latent spark will still be found to warm
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* Page 14.

some bosoms, which requires only the according breath of a people determined to be free, to kindle a flame sufficient to consume the proudest fabric of despotism; but should the independence of our legislature be once relinquished, the few miserable representatives of our degradation, aliens from their wretched country, and drawn within the vortex of the British minister, could, without difficulty, be prevailed upon to forfeit even the semblance of patriotism, forgetful of the interests of that unhappy country, which, in submitting to such measures, had forgot itself.

The fallacy of the arguments founded on the constitution of the United States of America, is too palpable to require exposure: but I own it surprises me, that the author should venture to introduce such arguments as might lead the mind to the contemplation of a free government, and of the blessings it produces; a train of thinking, which must militate most powerfully against the cause he wishes to promote.

With respect to those arguments founded on the difference of religious opinions between the Protestants and Roman Catholics in this country, I shall only observe, that the author is well aware of the policy of the maxim, "divide et impera," and adduces those arguments in prosecution of the system, already but
too

too successfully practised by the British government with respect to this country. I trust, however, that the period is not far distant, when an union of Irishmen will take place, when every distinction, but that of country, will be forgotten, and the people, no longer the dupes of those insidious arts which have been practised to disunite them, will, with one voice, assert their rights; such an effort must be successful, it must be irresistible! even the author of the pamphlet admits it. *

The author has, with much ingenuity, endeavoured to conciliate, where he cannot convince, and, with the suppleness of a courtier, has addressed himself to each religious sect in turn, expatiating upon the advantages which it must exclusively derive from an Union: but he has assumed a fact neither admitted nor proved; namely, that complete security of all rights and property must flow to this country from an Union: on this assumption most of his arguments depend, and by disproving this, (which I have already endeavoured to do) must they fall.

By stating that the chief opposition to an Union is likely to arise from the Bar †, the author of the pamphlet has furnished one of the most decisive arguments

* Page 49.

† Page 34.

arguments against the propriety of the measure.—
 The Bar here is on a footing entirely different from that in England ; it is the general custom in this country to educate every commoner of rank and fortune to that profession ; it may therefore be fairly estimated to possess one sixth of the property, and three fourths of the talents and information of the country, with a still greater proportion of legal and constitutional knowledge, and therefore its opposition to any public measure must be considered, (as it always has been, and as the author is aware it will be in the present instance) decisive evidence of the evil tendency of that measure.

The author states *, that 'tis said some leading characters at the Bar approve of a Union ; and argues, that as aged and experienced characters are as liable to political temptations as the virtuous arendcy of youth, and as they cannot be swayed by private interest, their opinion should outweigh that of the younger part of the profession. The author here assumes two facts ; first, that age is as liable to political temptation as youth, and next, that no interested motive operates upon the characters he alludes to ;—the former I deny, unless by “ political “ temptation” he means the temptation of avarice, which I am inclined to think meets his idea ;

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with regard to the latter, as the author only states the opinions of those aged and experienced characters from hear-say, and as perhaps they would wish to conceal even from themselves the motives which influence those opinions, I think the author is not warranted in the conclusions he draws.

It is said, that by a Union a preference would be insured for ever in the English markets, to the Irish linens and corn *.

We may argue from experience, (and the author himself furnishes me with an authority † for saying, that an argument from experience in political reasoning, is superior to any argument in theory) that Great Britain would not consider herself bound to this country, by any agreement that might militate against her interest: and it is not to be supposed, that the British minister, whose very existence depends upon the monied interest of that country, would hesitate to sacrifice to it the rights of this, degraded as it would be by a Union to the state of a despicable Province. And here, as a proof of that *liberality* which characterises Great Britain in all transactions relating to this country, let me advert to the treatment experienced by those miserable sufferers, who, on a recent occasion, yielding to the imperious necessity of the times, abandoned their

* Pages 28, 38, and 42.

property and habitations, to seek protection from Great Britain. As fellow-men, as fellow-subjects, and in distress, they had a claim upon the humanity, upon the benevolence of the British nation—but how strongly, how irresistibly was that claim enforced by the consideration, that the misfortunes under which they groaned were incurred by an attachment to the *British* government, that in *its* cause their last hopes were sacrificed!!—Yet in what manner were they received? How was their attachment rewarded? To some few perhaps, a churlish and temporary relief was extended; while the remainder were suffered to languish under the complicated miseries of poverty and exile, aggravated by the stupid and impertinent curiosity, or the insulting pity of the selfish and unfeeling! Such, my countrymen, is the *liberality* of Great Britain—such the nation in whose honour and whose justice we are implicitly to confide!

With regard to the fitness of the present time for the agitation of the question, the conduct of the British government is, in *that* instance, consistent: having industriously and effectually promoted religious jealousies and divisions, and excited a factitious spirit of loyalty, they are determined to avail themselves of the delusion while it still exists, and by seizing on the moment which domestic dissension and foreign

weakness have conspired to render favourable, to level at once the proud structure of Irish independence which the spirit and exertions of our Volunteers had erected. But let me intreat you, my countrymen, to declare your sentiments in the bold, yet moderate, language of men determined to protect their rights; and should your just and temperate remonstrances be disregarded, or the hand of power be exerted to enforce submission to a measure pregnant with destruction to your country, let me conjure you to rally round the sacred pile, with a determined resolution to protect it, (by every constitutional means) or perish beneath its ruins!!

One word upon what the author calls "false notions of pride," and the contempt with which he treats all objections drawn from the independence of this kingdom.

If in contemplating the wealth, the power, and the resources of Great Britain, in recounting the consequence in the scale of nations, as the envy and protectress of Europe, the author feels himself animated by national pride;—by what authority then does he presume to deny to the natives of this country, that laudable propensity? Is he not content with persevering tyranny to enslave the bodies, but must he also shackle the feelings and affections of Irishmen! Let him beware how he awakens the indignation

dignation of a brave, and (as yet) free People, left the British government should be convinced, *too late*, by sad experience, that the spirit of independence is not dead, it only slept.

Let us now take a short view of his answer to the arguments drawn from national dignity and national pride.

* "Ireland," says the author, "independent Ireland, has, at this moment, it's commerce in all parts of the world protected, without expence, by the British navy."

Will the author pretend to assert, that Ireland contributes nothing to the support of the British navy? Are the thousands of able and experienced seamen by which her fleets are manned, and who have contributed in no small degree to carry the British flag triumphant over the world, nothing? Is the supply of seamen invariably voted in time of war by the Irish parliament, nothing? Are the liberal, nay profuse pensions granted upon the Irish establishment, to be raised and paid out of the national purse, to the British admirals, and to every branch and connection of the royal family of Great Britain, nothing? But above all, is the vast *exclusive* market which Great Britain enjoys in this country for all her manufactures, a market more valuable than any other Europe could

afford, and of such extent, as to reach even the most miserable hovel, in the most inaccessible part of the kingdom, nothing? I will venture to assert, that the contribution of Ireland in the manner I have mentioned towards the expence of the British navy, is more than adequate to any protection she has ever received.

“ Her supplies for the year” (continues the author) “ are chiefly raised by the British minister in England, on the faith of the British parliament.”

That in that independence annexed to property, Ireland is not equal to Great Britain, I am willing to admit; but I trust she *will* prove herself equally independent in spirit.

“ Her country is protected from domestic and foreign enemies, by 40,000 British troops, at the expence to Great Britain, of £700,000 a-year.”

If Great Britain has thought proper to send a vast military force into this country, to answer some secret purpose, and without any benefit to Ireland, 'tis fit that Great Britain *alone* should bear the expence; and it is in the recollection of every man, that the late rebellion was suppressed before the arrival of the troops alluded to—and indeed little protection could be expected from them when one of their finest and most numerous regiments, it is said, refused to march out of the city of Dublin.

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It might be concluded from the arguments above cited, that the retaining Ireland as a part of her empire, is not an object to Great Britain: if it is *not*, why does she interfere with our constitution, for the avowed purpose of binding us more closely to her?—if it *is*, why are we told of a pitiful expence incurred in our protection, which is repaid tenfold by the advantages she derives from us?

Having thus considered the most prominent arguments adduced by the pamphlet, in favour of a Union, I freely admit that the adoption of some of the measures recommended by the author, particularly a modification of tithes, and a permanent establishment for the Roman Catholic clergy, would be highly beneficial to this country; but I see no necessity for clogging them with a Union.

The author having manifested a wish to meliorate the condition of this country, and at the same time to benefit the empire at large, and it being my earnest desire to accomplish the same ends, however we may differ as to the means, I beg leave, before I conclude, to suggest a plan, which I dare say will meet his approbation.—By the abolition of the slave trade, and the consequent emancipation of the negroes, the trade and property of Great Britain will be much injured; and the discovery of a remedy for the evil must be highly beneficial to the
state:

state: it strikes me that the natives of this country may be considered by the author as worthy to supply the place of the negroes; they are in general stronger, more tractable, and full as patient of fatigue, and have this peculiar advantage above the negroes, that they can labour incessantly upon the cheapest of all food—potatoes and water;—the substitution of them therefore in the stead of the negroes is much to be desired, and a proposition to that effect might, with much propriety, accompany the Union.—I merely submit this hint to the author of the pamphlet, not doubting but that his talents and patriotism will improve upon it!



FINIS.